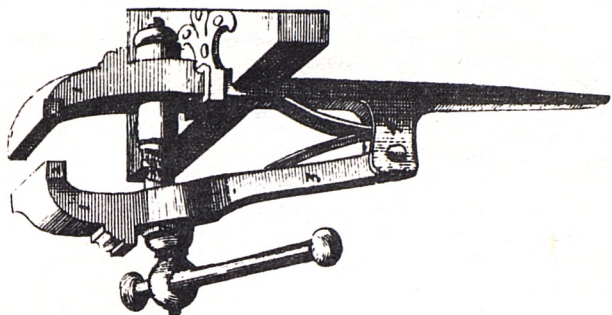


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### The Omen

Bill Wantling died at 12:15 pm  
May 2, 1974

About 5:15  
Ruthie & I walk away  
from the well wishing houseful

into the yard / "Just yesterday (she says)  
I was mowing the lawn / and saw  
this little green grass snake  
just in time / I stopped

"A living thing / a  
living thing / I thought  
a living thing (she says  
as the tears start) an omen  
a good omen / a living thing  
(tears still) and  
I watched him safely home  
his home / here at the roots of this tree  
see (as she parts the grass)  
see / he's still here  
a living thing (still  
more tears)"

I stand back  
and look at the living thing  
lingering / an omen  
laughing / licking  
flicking his forked tongue at me

(while Bill's cursed tongue is stilled)  
an omen all right / says I

But Ruthie isn't listening  
she is watching her nurse-neighbor come home from work  
she straightens up / stops  
her tears / sets her shoulders  
"I've got to tell Polly" she says  
and is gone  
across the lawn

and I / watching her stride  
cry / the first tide  
since he died / an omen  
a good omen / says I  
(more tears still)

### Ruthie

Ruthie

I

You were the bellows / for 5 yrs  
you forced your life into him  
you squeezed and squeezed / you  
pumped and primed (a kind  
of mouth to mouth resuscitation  
of the spirit) you  
jumped up and down / up  
and down / up and  
down on yourself / until  
every muscle in your spirit ached  
ached / ached

II

All that ache / to raise  
a spark here / a bellow there  
a poem / a glimpse  
through the trees at the moon

at the moon / the muse / his muse  
(he thought) the muse  
he loved and you hated / the muse  
that dry cold pale-faced bitch